

CONSTANTINE AS ΚΟΙΝΟΣ ΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ

TRADITION AND INNOVATION

IN THE REPRESENTATION OF THE

FIRST CHRISTIAN EMPEROR'S

MAJESTY

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This paper was read at a Symposium on "The Age of Constantine: Tradition and Innovation," held at Dumbarton Oaks in May 1966.

JACOB Burckhardt began his famous chapter on Constantine and the Christian Church with the remark: "In the case of a man of genius, whose ambition and love of power refuse to him a moment's peace, there can be no question of Christianity or paganism, of conscious religion or irreligion. Such a man, even when he persuades himself that he has his place in an ecclesiastical community, is essentially unreligious."¹ Even according to Eduard Schwartz's opinion,² Constantine's victory over his rivals as well as over the Church was due to his "diabolical cleverness." But the same scholar, who was so intimately acquainted with the religious and ecclesiastical problems of the Later Roman Empire, at last, in the second edition of his important study on Constantine and the Christian Church,³ modified his former opinion by acknowledging Constantine's "true irrational belief" in the God who had granted him victory and who had entrusted him with the guardianship of all human affairs.

In the meantime scholars have learned to understand that, as F. Lot remarked, "in this age there were no such persons as freethinkers."⁴

A better insight into the nature of Roman politics had been gained and there was no longer any doubt about the traditional coalition and the really inseparable connection between politics and religion. Diocletian, for example, had proclaimed: "The immortal gods will favour, as they always did, the Roman Empire, if we can be sure that all inhabitants of our Empire devote themselves to a pious, religious, quiet and chaste way of life."⁵ Relying on the same principle, Galerius had justified his edict of toleration: "Hence, in accordance with our pardon, it will be the duty of the Christians to pray to their God for our safety and that of the commonwealth and their own, that the commonwealth may be secure in every respect."⁶ Two years later, Constantine held the conviction that "the lawful revival and protection of the worship in which the highest reverence of the most heavenly power is maintained had caused the greatest good fortune to the Roman name and exceptional prosperity to all affairs of men."⁷

¹ N. H. Baynes, *Constantine the Great and the Christian Church*, The Raleigh Lecture on History, Proceedings of the British Academy, 35 (1929), p. 4; Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Zeit Constantins des Grossen*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig, 1898), p. 369 (1st ed., Basel, 1853).

² Ed. Schwartz, *Kaiser Constantinus und die christliche Kirche* (Leipzig, 1913), p. 155; Baynes, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

³ 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1936), p. 66.

⁴ F. Lot, *La fin du monde antique et le début du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1927), p. 34; quoted by Baynes, *op. cit.*, p. 32, note 8.

⁵ *Mosaicarum et Romanarum legum Collatio*, VI, 4, 1, Collectio librorum iuris anteiustiniiani, vol. 3 (ed. Th. Mommsen): *ita enim et ipsos immortales deos Romano nomini, ut semper fuerunt, faventes atque placatos futuros esse non dubium est, si cunctos sub imperio nostro agentes piam religiosamque et quietam et castam in omnibus mere (more maiorum coniec. Cuiacius) colere perspexerimus vitam.*

⁶ Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, 34, 5 (ed. J. Moreau, Sources Chrétiennes, 39): *iuxta hanc indulgentiam nostram debebunt deum suum orare pro salute nostra et rei publicae ac sua, ut undique versum res publica perstet incolumis et securi vivere in sedibus suis possint.*

⁷ Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, X, 7, 1 (ed. E. Schwartz, GCS, 2, 2): *ἐκ πλειόνων πραγμάτων φαίνεται παρεξουθενηθεῖσαν τὴν θρησκείαν, ἐν δὲ κορυφαίᾳ τῆς ἀγιωτάτης ἐπουρανίου αἰδώς φαίνεται,*

Constantine had already been converted to the Christian God when he started his letter to Anullinus with these words to give reasons for his granting immunity to the Christian clerics in Africa, but evidently, in spite of his new religious belief, he had not changed the traditional frame of reverence. And at this point we should bear in mind the warnings of Norman H. Baynes,⁸ who once protested energetically "that a man can only be rightly understood if he be regarded against the background of his world, that he can only be fairly judged in the light of the standards and the values of the society in which he lived." Every serious historian has to agree with this general rule. But we cannot unhesitatingly agree with Baynes's somewhat daring observation that "nearly all attempts to explain Constantine away as the natural outcome of the previous history of Rome have failed completely." Of course, Constantine represents a turning point in European history. He really appears to us as the man who took the initiative on every point in the reform of state and society. However, he had to find a reasonable solution to problems already existing; his particular achievement can be understood only in the light of this indebtedness to Roman political and religious (cultural) tradition and Hellenistic political theory. This is already proved by A. Alföldi's excellent study *The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome*,⁹ as well as by F. Dvornik's brilliant article, "Emperors, Popes, and General Councils."¹⁰

Constantine certainly is to be judged as an *homo politicus*; in this regard Piganiol¹¹ and Grégoire¹² have put us all in their debt with their scholarly observations. But both scholars have not, in my opinion, sufficiently emphasized the impact which Constantine's conversion had upon the whole of his political and ecclesiastical involvements.

Therefore, in view of the special subject of these studies, I should like to stress the *dialectical character* of the process in which Church and state became alike involved by the conversion of Constantine; for neither the senate, as the representative of the political tradition, nor the Church was ready to come immediately to an arrangement with a Christian emperor. As Constantine very soon realized, it was only by *risking experiments* that he could obtain the consensus he urgently pleaded for, on both sides.

μεγάλους κινδύνους ἐνηνοχέναι τοῖς δημοσίοις πράγμασιν αὐτήν τε ταύτην ἐνθέσμως ἀναληφθεῖσαν καὶ φύλασσομένην μεγίστην εύτυχίαν τῷ 'Ρωμαϊκῷ δύόματι καὶ σύμπασι τοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων πράγμασιν ἔξαίρετον εύδαιμονίαν παρεσχηκέναι; trans. in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd Ser., eds. Ph. Schaff and H. Wace, vol. I (Oxford-New York, 1890).

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 4; cf. H. Dörries, *Das Selbstzeugnis Kaiser Konstantins*, Abh. Akad. Göttingen, Phil.-Hist. Klasse, 3. Folge, No. 34 (Göttingen, 1954), p. 18.

⁹ Trans. H. Mattingly (Oxford, 1948).

¹⁰ *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 6 (1951), p. 1 ff.; see now his systematic study, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy, Origins and Background*, Dumbarton Oaks Studies, IX (Washington, D.C., 1966), 2, p. 611 ff., esp. p. 640 ff.

¹¹ A. Piganiol, *L'empereur Constantin* (Paris, 1932); *idem*, "L'état actuel de la question constantinienne 1930/49," *Historia*, 1 (1950), p. 82 ff.

¹² H. Grégoire, "Eusèbe n'est pas l'auteur de la 'Vita Constantini' dans sa forme actuelle et C. ne s'est pas 'converti' en 312," *Byzantion*, 13 (1938), p. 561 ff.; for detailed references, see K. F. Stroheker, "Das konstantinische Jahrhundert im Lichte der Neuerscheinungen 1940–1951," *Saeculum*, 3 (1952), p. 654 ff.; J. Vogt, "Constantinus der Grosse," *Reallex. f. Antike u. Christ.*, 3 (1955), col. 306 ff.; K. Aland, "Die religiöse Haltung Kaiser Konstantins," *Studia Patristica*, 1 = *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 63 (1957), pp. 549 ff., 553 ff.

At the very moment of his conversion he was compelled to realize that from then on he was forced to respect the *lex propria Christianorum*, defined by Tertullian;¹³ he had to renounce, at least for his own person, pagan sacrifices if he really intended to remain sure of the protection of the powerful God who had rendered him his miraculous aid, or—in other words—if he was seriously interested in appearing to the Christians as worshipping their God. To make a sacrifice or to refuse to make it had been, of course, the official test of religious faith in the time of persecution. The Spanish Bishop Ossius, of Cordova, may have informed the Emperor of the indispensable obligation of a believer in the Christian God to renounce sacrifices. Thus, Constantine, entering Rome as a triumphant liberator, abstained from ascending to the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus; he refused to make the traditional and obligatory sacrifices.

This unprecedented fact is suggested later by Eusebius;¹⁴ it can, however, be proved by an irrefutable observation: A pagan orator,¹⁵ who was officially commissioned to praise the Emperor's victory at the Milvian Bridge, reported every detail of the ceremonial entrance, but this panegyrical report does not make even a vague allusion to a sacrifice on the Capitol. Constantine had no objection to a pagan panegyrist praising his deeds; on the other hand, however, the orator obviously had to consider the change which had taken place in Constantine's relation to the ancient gods. This observation should be considered important for further studies. Attention must be paid to the way in which Constantine conceived of his belief in the God of the Christians, how he paid heed to the Christian concepts and how, on the other hand, pagans and Christians reacted to his profession.

The pagan orator deliberately speaks of the highest God (*summus rerum sator*),¹⁶ by whom Constantine was deemed worthy of his celestial revelation,¹⁷ but none of the well-known gods is mentioned by name. This is peculiar enough, but is understandable because Constantine himself used to refer to the Christian God, to whom he was converted, in the same manner (*summa divinitas, summus deus, potentissimus deus*, etc.).¹⁸ It may be considered an intentional ambiguity that on these occasions¹⁹ he did not dare call Christ by name

¹³ Tertullian, *De idololatria*, 24 (CSEL, 20).

¹⁴ *Vita Constantini*, I, 39 (ed. I. A. Heikel, GCS, 7): εὐχαριστήριον ἀπεδίδου παραχρῆμα εὐχὴν τῷ τῆς νίκης αἵριῳ. That Constantine refused the sacrifice to Jupiter Capitolinus when he celebrated his vicennalia in Rome in 326, is attested by Zosimus, II, 29, 5 (ed. L. Mendelssohn [Leipzig, 1887; reprinted Hildesheim, 1963]).

¹⁵ *Panegyricus XII (IX)*, 19, 3 (ed. R. A. B. Mynors [Oxford, 1964]); cf. J. Straub, "Konstantins Verzicht auf den Gang zum Kapitol," *Historia*, 4 (1955), pp. 297 ff., 308 f.; J. Vogt, "Die Bedeutung des Jahres 312 für die Religionspolitik Konstantins des Grossen," *Zeitschr. für Kirchengeschichte* (1942), p. 174 f.; Pio Franchi de' Cavalieri, "Intorno alla visione di Costantino ed al labaro," *Constantiniana = Studi e Testi*, 171 (1953), pp. 5 ff., 47. Aland, *op. cit.*, p. 549 ff.

¹⁶ *Pan. XII (IX)*, 26, 1; cf. *ibid.* 13, 2: *deus ille mundi creator et dominus*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2, 5: *habes projecto aliquod cum illa mente divina, Constantine, secretum, quae delegata nostri diis minoribus cura uni se tibi dignatur ostendere*.

¹⁸ For example, in his letter to Aelafius (Appendix to Optatus Milevitanus, III [CSEL, 26]); cf. *Urkunden zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Donatismus*, ed. Hans v. Soden, 2nd ed. rev. by Hans v. Campenhausen, Lietzmanns Kleine Texte, 122 (Berlin, 1950), no. 14, line 69.

¹⁹ But cf. Constantine's letter to the Synod of Arles (v. Soden and v. Campenhausen, *op. cit.*,

and that he did not wipe out paganism overnight.²⁰ However, besides the fact that Constantine himself had to clarify gradually his notion of his special relationship to the Christian God,²¹ we should bear in mind that the Emperor knew perfectly well that, as a political figure, he had to observe the traditional principles of tolerance. This he could do as long as his special relation to the Christian God was respected in the same way. Thus, the inscription and the decorations of the triumphal arch dedicated to him by the pagan senate may be considered an expression of *mutual accommodation* between the Emperor and the senate.

On the occasion of his *decennalia* (315) the senate dedicated a triumphal arch to Constantine.²² Some of its features are, in my opinion, very significant: The famous inscription refers to the triumph;²³ the reliefs, however, do not present the traditional *pompa triumphalis*, but a much less ceremonial act, namely, the *ingressus* with the Emperor sitting in a coach, whereas the triumphant emperor usually stands on the *currus triumphalis*. L'Orange put great stress on the appearance of Victoria bringing the laurel wreath to Constantine, of Sol, too, rising in his chariot, and of his counterpart Luna. Thus, an intentional ambiguity is characteristic also of the way in which the senate reacted, by appealing to the—pagan—idea of cosmic kingship.²⁴ On the one hand, it made a concession to Constantine by representing the gods in a quasi-allegorical or decorative fashion. On the other hand, it maintained the traditional claim that worship was owed to the gods; for this reason, several scenes of hunt sacrifices are included in the decoration;²⁵ but the symbolic character of these sacrifices apparent in the medallions (dating from the second century and used again here) becomes clearly evident if we compare this type of scene with the scene of a really official sacrifice, such as that represented on the basis of the Vicennialia monument of the Tetrarchs.²⁶ Even L'Orange allows us to suppose that here we have a cautious attempt to reconcile the pagan demand with the Emperor's new kind of *pietas*.²⁷ Aland²⁸ therefore is right when, in

no. 18), where he distinguishes between *deus omnipotens in caeli specula residens* (line 12) and *Christus salvator* (line 52). About Constantine's Christology, cf. Dörries, *op. cit.*, p. 376f.

²⁰ Cf. Alföldi, *The Conversion of Constantine* (*supra*, p. 40), p. 26.

²¹ J. Straub, *Vom Herrscherideal in der Spätantike* (Stuttgart, 1939; reprint, 1964), p. 131ff.; Heinz Kraft, *Kaiser Konstantins religiöse Entwicklung*, Beiträge zur historischen Theologie, ed. G. Ebeling, no. 20 (Tübingen, 1955).

²² H. P. L'Orange, with the collaboration of A. v. Gerkan, *Der spätantike Bildschmuck des Konstantinsbogens*, Studien zur spätantiken Kunstgeschichte, eds. H. Lietzmann and G. Rodenwaldt, 10 (Berlin, 1939).

²³ H. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, 1 (Berlin, 1892), no. 694: *arcum triumphis insignem dicavit (scil. S.P.Q.R.).*

²⁴ H. P. L'Orange, *Studies on the Iconography of Cosmic Kingship in the Ancient World* (Oslo, 1953), pp. 139f., 148f.

²⁵ L'Orange, *Bildschmuck*, p. 168ff.

²⁶ Heinz Kähler, *Rom und seine Welt*, Bilder zur Geschichte und Kultur (München, 1958), pl. 250, where the Suovetaurilia are represented.

²⁷ L'Orange, *Bildschmuck*, p. 179, refers to the “ideological change which takes place during the 4th century” (“der ideologische Wandel, der sich im Laufe des vierten Jahrhunderts vollzieht”); “The Arch of Constantine stands at an important turning point, from which prospects of the pagan as well as of the Christian world open” (“Der Konstantinsbogen steht an einem wichtigen Scheidepunkt, von dem sich Ausblicke sowohl in die heidnische wie in die christliche Welt eröffnen”).

²⁸ Aland, *op. cit.*, p. 585.

view of the pagan character of the senate by whose initiative the triumphal arch was erected, he states that "all evidence gained from the Arch of Constantine is quite relative and should only be taken as proof that Constantine permitted such representations." During his whole reign the Emperor tolerated pagan religions; though since 312 he made no secret of the fact that he believed in the God of the Christians, he only insisted that in pagan representations of his official acts no direct affront against specifically Christian convictions should be committed. This would have been the case had reverence to a particular, specified pagan god been attributed to him; but it was not necessarily so when he was represented in a semi-private scene of sacrificing after the hunt.

Constantine's relation to Sol took a similar form. Of course, Constantine had been sincerely devoted to the sun-god. Some years before his conversion, in the temple of a Gallic city he had had a vision of Apollo, the Celtic sun-god.²⁹ Even after his conversion to Christianity he let himself be represented on coins as equal to *Sol Comes*.³⁰ But the Christians, too, had been accustomed to the idea of Christ as *Sol Iustitiae*, whose image in the time of Constantine could be seen in the family vault of the Julii in Rome.³¹

As Hermann Usener has remarked, "the notion of an immovable, all-powerful sun-god must have become so familiar that for Christians, too, it automatically became a way of visualizing the Saviour."³² Tertullian had already thought it necessary to rebut the view that the Christians worshipped the sun.³³ So we may assume that, personally, Constantine continued to visualize his Saviour God in the guise of Sol and thus made it possible for the pagans, too, to identify, for example, the Neoplatonic idea of god with that of the Christians.

The so-called ambiguity of those symbolic figures becomes comprehensible "as soon as we take into account the borrowings and influences which occurred mutually between the Christian and the pagan world."³⁴ This process could not be completed with the conversion of Constantine; it continued for a long time, since the Christians themselves were convinced that they only had to "baptize," as it were, pagan culture in the spirit of the *praeparatio evangelica*, to be able to continue to nurture and preserve it as an inalienable heritage.³⁵

²⁹ *Pan. VI (VII)*, 21, 3 ff.; for lit., see Vogt, "Constantinus der Grosse," col. 316.

³⁰ Straub, *Herrscherideal*, p. 131; H. v. Schoenebeck, *Beiträge zur Religionspolitik des Maxentius und Constantius*, *Klio*, Beiheft 43 (Leipzig, 1939), pp. 97–122.

³¹ H. P. L'Orange, "Sol Invictus Imperator. Ein Beitrag zur Apotheose," *Symbolae Osloenses*, 14 (1935), pp. 86–114; B. M. Apollonj Ghetti and others, *Esplorazioni sotto la Confessione di San Pietro in Vaticano* (Vatican City, 1951), I, pls. B, C, pp. 38, 42. Baynes, *op. cit.*, p. 95 ff.

³² H. Usener, "Sol Invictus," *Rheinisches Museum*, 60 (1905), p. 465 ff.; *idem*, *Das Weihnachtsfest*, 2nd ed. (Bonn, 1911), p. 356.

³³ F. J. Dölger, *Die Sonne der Gerechtigkeit und der Schwarze*, Liturgiegeschichtliche Forschungen, 2 (Münster, 1918); *idem*, *Sol Salutis, Gebet und Gesang im christlichen Altertum*, Liturgiegesch. Forschungen, 4–5 (Münster, 1920).

³⁴ Usener, *Das Weihnachtsfest*, p. xi.

³⁵ L'Orange himself states that even later on, in the times of definitely Christian emperors, the schematic representation of the emperors as Sol continued to be used, "so that the original pagan symbolism of Sol gets toned down to a neutral allegory" ("so ist die ursprünglich heidnische Sonnen-symbolik jetzt zur neutralen Allegorie verblasst," "Sol Invictus Imperator," p. 104); therefore I

As Byzantine historians relate, by Constantine's will a statue was erected in Constantinople of his sun-like majesty—λάμποντι Ἡλίου δίκην—wearing the radiate crown and holding in his right hand a globe surmounted by a cross.³⁶ In the view of the pagans Constantine was thus equated with Helios; in the view of the Christians he resembled Christ, whose representation in art he wanted to imitate. A third interpretation was simply to regard the statue as representing the glorious majesty of the Emperor. This observation holds true, too, for the further development of Constantine's image after his death. Philostorgius³⁷ says that in earlier times lamps and wax candles were lit before the statue and that prayers were offered there for the curing of diseases. In the Orthodox Church Constantine is still venerated as a saint; therefore, it is understandable that Christians paid homage to the image of Saint Constantine;³⁸ but it is also understandable that they were accused by Philostorgius of worshiping him as a god. There is no reason to believe that only one of these interpretations is correct. But, of course, a distinction must be made between the judgement which others passed on him, and the way Constantine understood himself and how he wished to be seen.

Constantine professed the Christian creed and we must take his own word for it. However, we must not expect that he understood the Christian faith in the same way the Church Fathers did; neither can we expect all subjects to interpret correctly the manifestation of his concept of the imperial office.

A similar distinction should be made, too, in regard to the commemorative coins struck after his death.³⁹ "The coins bore the following device," says Eusebius: "On one side appeared the figure of our blessed prince, his head closely veiled. The reverse exhibited him sitting as a charioteer drawn by four horses, with a hand stretched downward from above to receive him up to heaven."⁴⁰ As we know, this is in fact the type commemorating the act of consecration,⁴¹ namely, the deification of an emperor. Whenever an emperor

share Aland's opinion that this change towards the *interpretatio Christiana* must have already taken place under Constantine (Aland, *op. cit.*, p. 586).

³⁶ Th. Preger, "Konstantinos-Helios," *Hermes*, 36 (1901), p. 457ff.; J. Karayannopoulos, "Konstantin der Grosse und der Kaiserkult," *Historia*, 5 (1956), p. 341ff.

³⁷ Philostorgius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, II, 17 (ed. J. Bidez, GCS, 21); Theodore, *Historia ecclesiastica*, I, 34, 3 (eds. L. Parmentier and F. Scheidweiler, 2nd ed. [1954], GCS, 44).

³⁸ Theodore, *loc. cit.*: Οἰς ρέδιον ἐντυχεῖν καὶ μαθεῖν ὅπως τῶν ὅλων ὁ πρύτανις γεράπει τοὺς εὔνους Σεράπιοντας. εἰ δέ τις ἑκείνοις διαπιστεῖ, τὰ νῦν περὶ τὴν ἑκείνου θήκην καὶ τὸν ἀνδριάντα γινόμενα βλέπων, πιστευσάτω τοῖς γεγραμμένοις καὶ τῷ φῆσαντι δεσπότῃ. "τοὺς δοξάζοντάς με δοξάσω καὶ οἱ ἔξουθενωδήσονται".

³⁹ Leo Koep, "Die Konsekrationsmünzen Kaiser Konstantins und ihre religionspolitische Bedeutung," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, I (1958), p. 94ff.; P. Bruun, "The Consecration Coins of Constantine the Great," *Acta Philologica Fennica*, N.S., I (1954), p. 19ff.; A. Grabar, "Recherches sur les sources juives de l'art paléochrétien," *Cahiers archéologiques*, 14 (1964), p. 53f.

⁴⁰ Eusebius, *Vita Const.*, IV, 73. L. Koep and A. Hermann, "Consecratio," *Reallex. f. Antike u. Christ.*, 3, col. 269f.

⁴¹ But, of course, this representation of the divus (Constantine), rising to heaven in the sun-god's quadriga is unique; L'Orange, "Sol Invictus Imperator," pp. 86ff., 100. In earlier times coins show the quadriga placed on the top platform of the robus (cf. the well-known London ivory diptych: E. Kitzinger, *Early Medieval Art in the British Museum*, 2nd ed. [London, 1955], p. 13, pl. 6; A. Rumpf, "Römische historische Reliefs," *Bonner Jahrbücher*, 155/56 [1955/56], p. 127f.; R. Delbrueck, *Die Consular-Diptychen und verwandte Denkmäler*, Studien zur spätantiken Kunstgeschichte, 2 [Berlin-Leipzig, 1929], pl. 59); M. Bernhart, *Handbuch zur Münzkunde der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Halle, 1926), Plates, pl. 55, 8 (Antoninus Pius); F. Gnechi, *I medagliioni romani* (Milan, 1912), 2, pl. 116, 3 (Salo-

died, the senate was entitled to confirm by a *senatusconsultum* that he had become worthy to be received into the celestial community of the eternal gods: *caelo demissus, caelo receptus*—he, who descended from heaven and ascended to heaven, was recognized as a *divus*;⁴² but we know that Constantine was baptized on his deathbed and “the earthly tabernacle of his thrice blessed soul was honoured by the performance of the sacred ordinances and mystic service. The coffin was placed in the church dedicated to the Apostles of our Saviour.”⁴³ We may question whether Constantine wished to be, even after his death, equated with Christ, or whether he himself would have approved the judgement of the Church equating him later with the Apostles, as *ισαπόστολος*.⁴⁴ It may be doubted whether the senate was ordered to consecrate Constantine; nevertheless, consecration coins were struck by the imperial mints of Constantine’s sons: The *divus* is depicted on a chariot riding up to heaven, from where the hand of God was extended to him. This hand is the only, yet indisputable, evidence of an *interpretatio Christiana*. Such a hand is found in the paintings in the synagogue of Dura.⁴⁵ This symbol is to be derived from old Oriental tradition.⁴⁶ It was comprehensible to pagans also who, for example, were reminded that the father of Constantine ascended to heaven *Iove ipso dexteram porrigente*:⁴⁷ Jupiter received him. On the coins we have the same scene; however, the symbol of the hand stretched downward from above was authorized by the Bible⁴⁸ and it remained from now on a Christian symbol.⁴⁹

ninus); J. Maurice, *Numismatique constantinienne* (Paris, 1908), I, pl. XXII, 8 (Constantius). Eunapios, fr. 26 (*Fragmenta Hist. Graec.*, 4, ed. C. Müller) mentions the oracle which was said to apply to Julian: δὴ τότε σὲ πρὸς Ὀλυμπὸν δγει πυριλαμπὲς δχημα; cf. P. Giessen 3 (U. Wilcken, *Grundzüge u. Chrestomathie d. Papyruskunde* [Leipzig, 1912], I, I, p. 420; I, 2, p. 571, no. 491): ἄρματι λευκοπόλω δέρτι Τραϊανῷ συναντεῖλας ἥκω (sc. Apollo; cf. E. Kornemann, *Klio*, 7 [1907], p. 278ff.). For a similar representation of an apotheosis (of Marcus Aurelius?) cf. E. Strong, *Apotheosis and Afterlife* (London, 1915), p. 90f. A. Kaniuth, *Die Beisetzung Konstantins des Grossen, Untersuchungen zur religiösen Haltung des Kaisers*, Breslauer Hist. Forschungen, Heft 18 (Breslau, 1941), p. 69; J. Straub, “Die Himmelfahrt des Julianus Apostata,” *Gymnasium*, 69 (1962), p. 310ff.

⁴² Koep and Hermann, *op. cit.*, cols. 269f., 284f.; M. Bernhart, “Consecratio,” *Festschr. F. Hommel*, 2 (1918), p. 155f.; E. Beurlier, *Essai sur le culte rendu aux empereurs* (Paris, 1890), p. 66f.

⁴³ Eusebius, *Vita Const.*, IV, 71; R. Krautheimer, “Zu Konstantins Apostelkirche,” *Mullus, Festschr. Theodor Klauser = Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, Ergänzungsband 1 (1964), p. 224ff.

⁴⁴ O. Treitinger, *Die oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee, nach ihrer Gestaltung im höfischen Zeremoniell* (reprint Darmstadt, 1956), p. 129f.; Kaniuth, *op. cit.*, p. 35; E. Ewig, “Das Bild Constantins des Grossen in den ersten Jahrhundertern des abendländischen Mittelalters,” *Historisches Jahrbuch der Görresgesellschaft*, 75 (1956), p. 3. The term *ισαπόστολος* cannot be found before the fifth century; Constantine whose aim had been to be baptized in the River Jordan left the visitors of his tomb free to decide whether he was to be counted as *τρισκαιδέκατος ἀπόστολος* among the apostles, or to be seen as *ισόχριστος*.

⁴⁵ C. H. Kraeling, *The Synagogue, The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report*, 8, pt. I (New Haven, 1956), p. 178f., pls. LXIX and LXX.

⁴⁶ A. Alföldi, “Die Geburt der Kaiserlichen Bildsymbolik,” *Museum Helveticum*, 7 (1950), p. 11; H. Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals* (London, 1939), p. 207f.; R. Labat, *Le caractère religieux de la royauté assyro-babylonienne* (Paris, 1939), p. 92f.

⁴⁷ *Pan. VI* (VII), 7.3: *Vere enim projecto illi superum templo patuerunt receptusque est concessu caelitum, Iove ipso dexteram porrigente*; P. Franchi de' Cavalieri, “I funerali ed il sepolcro di Costantino Magno,” *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire*, Ecole franç. de Rome, 36 (1916/17), p. 258 (reprinted in *Studi e Testi*, 222 [1962], p. 265f.).

⁴⁸ Koep, “Die Konsekrationsmünzen Kaiser Konstantins,” p. 100, note 51.

⁴⁹ E.g., the Munich ivory diptych representing the apotheosis of Christ: H. Schrade, “Zur Ikonographie der Himmelfahrt Christi,” *Vorträge der Bibl. Warburg* 1928–1929 (1930), p. 89f., fig. 2. In Constantine’s lifetime the miraculous aid of God’s hand is mentioned by Lactantius, *De mort. pers.*, 24, 5:

(We may note in passing that, since it was not authorized by the Bible, Christ ascending to heaven was never in later times represented in a chariot. Elijah, on the other hand, could be represented in such a way, because in his case the chariot is in fact mentioned in the Bible.)

The Church was not prepared for a Christian emperor of the kind represented by Constantine. A legend had been transmitted that Philippus Arabs had been converted and that he was admitted to the eucharistic liturgy after he had confessed his sins.⁵⁰ Nothing, however, is said of any change in the methods of his government. In later times another legend was attached to the same Emperor: Philippus, celebrating the millennium of Rome, had omitted the official sacrifices on the Capitol.⁵¹ These two prerequisites—confession of sins and refusal of the sacrifice—were sufficient to mark him a Christian. Nothing else, it seems, was required for him to be called a Christian ruler. The Christian community had not been concerned with the affairs of state government. They were, according to the Lord's and St. Paul's words, obedient to the secular ruler whose power was granted by God's grace. Like Tertullian, most of the Christians could not even imagine how a Roman emperor could be converted at all. Nevertheless, he was respected as *secundus a deo*, and his commands were loyally obeyed.⁵²

Constantine, therefore, could not expect any special advice from the Church in regard to his imperial duty. Even when he wished to obtain the guarantee of the Christian God for the prosperity of the Roman Empire, he had to make use of the well-tried methods of *traditional Roman policy*. He granted property and money to the Church; the clerics obtained immunity from all public burdens “so that they might not be diverted... from the service which is owed to the divinity, but may rather without any disturbance serve their own law, since their conduct of the greatest worship toward the divinity will, in my opinion, bring immeasurable benefit to the commonwealth.”⁵³ The motives are evident: by these donations the same importance was attributed to the

dei manus hominem protegebat; 44, 9: *manus dei supererat aciei*; Eusebius, *Triakontaeterikos*, 7 (ed. I. A. Heikel, GCS, 7, p. 215, 10): ἐπὶ τὴν ἄμυναν τῶν πολεμίων τὴν αὐτοῦ δεξιὰν ἐκτείνας. In a famous gold medallion (A. Grabar, “Un médaillon en or provenant de Mersine en Cilicie,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 6 [1951], p. 39, fig. 6), Constantine is crowned by God's hand stretched out, his sons are crowned, in the traditional manner, by symbolic figures.

⁵⁰ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, VI, 34.

⁵¹ Orosius, *Historiae adversus paganos*, VII, 20 (CSEL, 5): *hic primus imperatorum omnium Christianus fuit ac post tertium imperii eius annum millesimus a conditione Romae annus impletus est. ita magnificis ludis augustissimus omnium praeteritorum hic natalis annus a Christiano imperatore celebratus est. nec dubium est, quin Philippus huius tantae devotionis gratiam et honorem ad Christum et Ecclesiam reportarit, quando vel ascensum fuisse in Capitolium immolatasque ex more hostias nullus auctor ostendit.*

⁵² Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 21, 24 (ed. C. Becker, 2nd. ed. [Munich, 1961]): *sed et Caesares credidissent super Christo, si aut Caesares non essent necessarii saeculo, aut si et Christiani potuissent esse Caesares; idem, Ad Scapulam, 2, 7 (CSEL, 76); cf. Optatus Milevitanus, Contra Parm. Donat., III, 3 (CSEL, 26, p. 75, 10f.): cum super imperatorem non sit nisi solus deus, qui fecit imperatorem. A. Ehrhardt, “Constantin d. Gr. Religionspolitik und Gesetzgebung,” *Zeitschrift d. Savigny-Stiftung f. Rechtsgeschichte*, Rom. Abt., 72 (1955), pp. 127 ff., 149; J. Straub, “Kaiser Konstantin als ἑπτάκοπτος τῶν ἑκτός,” *Studia Patristica*, 1 = *Texte u. Untersuchungen*, 63 (1957), p. 687.*

⁵³ Constantine's letter to Anullinus: Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, X, 7, 2; trans. by A. H. M. Jones in *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (London, 1948), p. 83.

cult of the Christian God as was attributed to the traditional cults supported by the government.

The Church might appreciate such generosity as a sign of Constantine's personal favor; but by granting such privileges, the Emperor positively manifested that the state officially was interested in the cult of the Christian God.

When, at the end of the fourth century, the pagan cults were definitely deprived of their privileges, Zosimos stated: οὐ κατὰ θεσμὸν πράττεσθαι τὰ τελούμενα μὴ δημοσίου τοῦ δαπανήματος ὄντος (IV, 59, 3); if the cults are not officially supported by state privileges and by regular financial allowances, the government is no longer allowed to rely on the protection of those gods who once had favored the establishment of the Roman Empire.

Constantine did not go so far as to withdraw the usual endowments from the pagan priesthoods. He did not even give up his title of *Pontifex Maximus*. As Alföldi has stated,⁵⁴ it was very difficult for the ancients to conceive that there could be only one god. When Constantine himself became aware of the existence of *unus deus verus*, he remained inclined to tolerate the different kinds of religious devotion dedicated to the Almighty Being that used to be called and invoked by different names. Nevertheless, as far as he himself was concerned, he had identified himself with the Christian creed.

Furthermore, in his opinion the prosperity of the Roman commonwealth depended on the common worship of the Christian God. "If God is to do his part, the emperor and the Church in return must render to him the loyalty of concord."⁵⁵ Constantine's aim was, therefore, to protect—or rather to establish—the union of all the Christian communities, and he was amazed when he became aware of serious dissensions disturbing the unity he had counted on.

Now, the methods used by the Emperor in order to reconcile the dissidents are very significant: Instinsky,⁵⁶ Grasmück,⁵⁷ and Calderone⁵⁸ proved convincingly that Constantine, when the Donatists appealed to him, followed the traditional juridical procedure of submitting the complaints to a court of arbitration. It was by ordering bishops as *iudices dati* to conduct the proceedings of the so-called *cognitio* that the Emperor dealt with the ecclesiastical affair. Miltiades, the bishop of Rome, presided over the juridical council installed by the order of the Emperor. The Bishop, however, assimilated the procedure to the synodical tradition of the Church by adding more than a dozen Italian bishops to his council.⁵⁹ When the Donatists appealed again to the Emperor, he once more summoned bishops as *iudices dati*. This time, however, a much larger number was summoned, and the Emperor even offered them a free journey; so, depending on the point of view one takes, one can argue either that the once independent council of bishops was converted into

⁵⁴ *The Conversion of Constantine*, p. 56f.

⁵⁵ Baynes, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁵⁶ H. U. Instinsky, *Bischofsstuhl und Kaiserthron* (Munich, 1959), p. 59ff.

⁵⁷ E. L. Grasmück, *Coercitio, Staat und Kirche im Donatistenstreit*, Bonner Histor. Forschungen, 22 (Bonn, 1964), p. 34ff.

⁵⁸ S. Calderone, *Costantino e il Cattolicesimo*, 1 (Florence, 1962).

⁵⁹ Grasmück, *op. cit.*, p. 45ff.

an imperial commission, or vice versa. The assembly was ordered to act as a court of arbitration, but the bishops took advantage of the opportunity and combined their court session with a synodical session and passed a number of resolutions on Church discipline.⁶⁰

Both, Emperor and Church, had to experiment. The dialectical process, as I have just pointed out, was affected both by the Emperor's initiative and by the adherence of the Church to its tradition of autonomy. The Emperor's claim to union, however, encroached inevitably upon the usual and traditional method of ecclesiastical self-determination. In a letter to his African prefect, Constantine emphasized:⁶¹ "I consider it absolutely contrary to the divine law that we should overlook such quarrels and contentions, whereby the Highest Divinity may perhaps be moved to wrath, not only against the human race, but also against myself, to whose care He has, by His celestial will, committed the government of all earthly things.... For I shall really and fully be able to feel secure and always to hope for prosperity and happiness from the ready kindness of the most mighty God, only when I see all venerating the most holy God in the proper cult of the catholic religion with harmonious brotherhood of worship."

Therefore we may state with A. H. M. Jones: "This passage is the key to Constantine's whole religious position;"⁶² the government of all earthly things is committed to him by God himself—therefore, he is also authorized to watch over the Christian community and to take care of the common worship of the true God. On such grounds he feels himself entitled to convoke the bishops of the Church to the first ecumenical council in order to achieve the right definition of the true faith.

In the *Codex Iuris Canonici* the character of the ecumenical council is defined as follows:⁶³ *Dari nequid oecumenicum concilium quod a Romano pontifice non fuerit convocatum.* An ecumenical council must be convoked by the pope, who himself—or whose representative—presides over the sessions and confirms its decisions.

The first ecumenical council was convoked by the Emperor, who inaugurated the sessions in his palace,⁶⁴ and who participated in the discussions as president, whilst bishops of the highest prestige acted as chairmen. The Emperor confirmed the decisions of the council by proclaiming them in an official edict, so that they had to be respected as state-laws; this meant that any one who ignored these laws was liable to prosecution.

There was one item which providentially saved the autonomy of the bishops, as F. Dvornik has remarked:⁶⁵ The emperor never had the right to vote in the senate. After making his *relatio*, he called upon the members to state

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁶¹ Constantine's letter to Aelafius, in v. Soden and v. Campenhausen, *op. cit.*, no. 14, line 65 ff. The text is translated by Jones, *op. cit.* (see the following note).

⁶² Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

⁶³ Canon 222.

⁶⁴ Eusebius, *Vita Const.*, III, 10: ἐν αὐτῷ δὴ τῷ μεσαιτάτῳ οἴκῳ τῶν βασιλείων. See C. v. Hefele, *Concilien geschichte*, 1, 2nd ed. (Freiburg i.B., 1873), p. 300, note 2.

⁶⁵ Dvornik, "Emperors, Popes, and General Councils" (see note 10), p. 9.

their points of view. There is no trace in the acts of the council of Constantine voting with the bishops. He only confirmed their decision and made it legal.

The formal procedure corresponded to the traditional procedure followed in sessions of the senate. But in regard to the Church's synodical tradition, the Emperor's conduct was revolutionary: although no objection was raised by the Church Fathers, we must note that normally the participation in a synod was limited to bishops or clerics. *Constantine was not even baptized*; he had no right at all to take part in the eucharistic liturgy. Scholars do not usually place particular emphasis on this amazing fact: they are, as a rule, content to state that Constantine professed to be a Christian and that he was considered a Christian by the bishops whom he addressed as his brothers and who should respect him as their συνθεράπων.⁶⁶ But it taxed even Eusebius to come to terms with this "ambiguity." He himself tells us what the Emperor professed in the moment when he was baptized: "Should I be destined henceforth to associate with the people of God (τῷ τοῦ Θεοῦ λαῷ) and unite with them in prayer as a member of His Church, I shall prescribe myself from this time on such a course of life as befits His service."⁶⁷ It follows that in the formal sense of Christian discipline and faith the Emperor during the entire course of his life was not a regular member of the Church. It is, therefore, striking to observe how Eusebius tries to explain Constantine's quasi-canonical devotion to the Church: "We are told how he modelled, *as it were*, his very palace after the fashion of God's Church (ἐκκλησίας Θεοῦ τρόπον), and how he himself offered a pattern of zeal to those assembled therein, how he took the sacred scriptures into his hands and devoted himself to the study of those divinely inspired oracles, after which he would offer up regular prayers with all the members of his imperial court."⁶⁸ In another report⁶⁹ Eusebius says: "Just as if he were one sharing in the holy mysteries (οἵα τις μέτοχος ἱερῶν ὀργίων) of our religion, he would seclude himself daily at a certain hour in the innermost chambers of

⁶⁶ Eusebius, *Vita Const.*, II, 69 (GCS, 7, p. 68, 27); Dörries, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

⁶⁷ Eusebius, *Vita Const.*, IV, 62: Εἰ γάρ καὶ πάλιν ἡμᾶς ἐνταῦθοι βιοῦν δ καὶ Ιωῆς καὶ θαυμάτου κύριος ἔφελοι, καὶ οὕτως ἐμὲ συναγελάλεσθαι λοιπὸν τῷ τοῦ Θεοῦ λαῷ καὶ ταῖς εὐχάριστοις διορθώσεις πάσιν ἐκκλησιάλοντα κοινωνεῖν ἀπαξ ὀρισται, <καὶ> Θεομούς ήδη βίου θεῷ πρέποντας ἐμαυτῷ διατετάχομαι.

⁶⁸ Eusebius, *Vita Const.*, IV, 17: Σκέψαιτο δ' ἄν τις τὰ τούτων σεμνότερα, διαγνοὺς ὡς ἐν αὐτοῖς τοῖς βασιλείοις ἐκκλησίας Θεοῦ τρόπον διέθετο, σπουδῆς ἔξαρχων αὐτὸς τῶν ἐνδον ἐκκλησιαζομένων μετὰ χειράς γέ τοι λαμβάνων τὰς βίβλους τῇ τῶν θεοπνεύστων λογίων θεωρίᾳ προσανείχε τὸν νοῦν, εἰτ' εὐχάριστος ἐνθέσμους σὺν τοῖς τὸν βασιλείον οίκον πληροῦσιν ἀπεδίδου. Among the examples of mutual accommodation, mentioned in this study, one could, as I think, also count the "basilicas" built by Constantine which Eusebius calls οἴκοι βασιλικοί (*Triak.*, 9 [GCS, 7, p. 222, 2]); cf. E. Langlotz, *Reallex. f. Antike u. Christ.*, I, col. 1225ff.; *idem*, "Der architektonische Ursprung der christlichen Basilika," *Festschrift H. Jantzen* (Berlin, 1951), p. 30ff., esp. p. 36; R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, The Pelican History of Art (1965), p. 21; *idem*, "The Constantinian Basilica," in this volume, pp. 115-140.

⁶⁹ Eusebius, *Vita Const.*, IV, 22: Αὐτὸς δ' οἵα τις μέτοχος ἱερῶν ὀργίων ἐν ἀπορήτοις είσω τοῖς αὐτοῦ βασιλικοῖς ταμείοις καιροῖς ἐκάστης ἡμέρας τακτοῖς ἑαυτὸν ἔγκλείων, μόνος μόνῳ τῷ αὐτοῦ προσωμίλει θεῷ, ἵκετηρικαῖς τε δεήσεσι γονυπετῶν κατεδυσώπει δῶν ἐδεῖτο τυχεῖν, ταῖς δὲ τῆς σωτηρίου ἑορτῆς ἡμέραις ἐπιτείνων τὴν ἀσκησιν πάσῃ ῥώμῃ ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος τὰς θείας ἱεροφαντίας ἐτελεῖτο, δῶδε μὲν ἀγνεῖα βίου δλως ἀνακείμενος, δῶδε δὲ τοῖς πᾶσι τῆς ἑορτῆς ἔξαρχων; cf. *idem*, *Triak.*, 2 (GCS, 7, p. 200, 1 ff.). As to the account of Eusebius, it has to be questioned whether in fact the τῆς τε σεμνῆς καὶ καλλιτερποῦς θυσίας ἱεροφάντης (*ibid.*, 3) took part in the eucharistic liturgy celebrated by priests; in my opinion, Eusebius certainly would have said so; rather, it is quite clear by his report, that Constantine endeavored to demonstrate his quasi-episcopal position in this special form of divine service.

his palace, and there in *solitary* communion with his God, he would kneel in humble supplication and entreat the blessings of which he stood in need.” The Emperor behaved οἵα τις μέτοχος Ἱερῶν ὁργίων, which means that he was comparable to a hierophant; he was praying and celebrating Church festivals as if he were a member of the Church, as if his palace were a church of God.

In view of the testimonies just mentioned, we should be able to understand what Eusebius really meant when, in a similar phrase, he compared Constantine to a bishop: οἵα τις κοινὸς ἐπίσκοπος ἐκ Θεοῦ καθεσταμένος συνόδους τῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ λειτουργῶν συνεκρότει (V.C., I, 44). Just as if he were a general bishop ordained by God, he convened synods of God’s ministers. We see that Eusebius is constantly aware of the problem with which the Church was confronted, and he points to the way of comparative interpretation of which we have spoken.

According to Jacob Burckhardt, Eusebius was one of the most disgusting of all panegyrists, who is supposed to have falsified the portrait of Constantine.⁷⁰ However, in my opinion, Eusebius was in fact a very competent interpreter, and an effective inspirer, of the Emperor’s own political intentions and of the concept of his special mission.⁷¹ Constantine himself was convinced that he was chosen by God: “I myself was the instrument whose services He chose and deemed suited for the accomplishment of His will.”⁷² Even the pagans did not question that he was acting *instinctu divinitatis*.⁷³ The supreme divinity did reveal itself to him: *uni se tibi dignatur ostendere*.⁷⁴ The Christian followers who used to look for biblical examples referred to Moses and David, and compared the Emperor’s miraculous conversion with the calling of St. Paul.⁷⁵ They did not hesitate to praise him as a prophet (ὑποφήτης)⁷⁶ and teacher of true piety (διδάσκαλος τῆς εὐσεβείας),⁷⁷ thus attributing to him qualities equal to those of a bishop. Indeed, they were ready to go further. They had no reason to see any conflict between Tertullian’s thesis of the Emperor as *secundus a deo* and Eusebius’ concept of the Emperor as God’s vice-gerent on earth.

⁷⁰ Burckhardt, *Die Zeit Constantins des Grossen*, p. 355.

⁷¹ J. Moreau, “Eusebius v. Caesarea,” *Reallex. f. Antike u. Christ.*, 4, col. 1052ff.; F. E. Cranz, “Kingdom and Polity in Eusebius of Caesarea,” *Harv. Theol. Rev.*, 45 (1952), p. 57ff.; N. H. Baynes, “Eusebius and the Christian Empire,” *Byzantine Studies and other Essays* (London, 1955), 168ff., reprint from *Annuaire de l’Institut de philol. et d’hist. orient.*, 2 (1933/34), pp. 13–18; Straub, *Herrscherideal*, p. 116ff. A. Ehrhardt, *Politische Metaphysik von Solon bis Augustinus*, 2 (Tübingen, 1959), chap. 7.

⁷² *Vita Const.*, II, 28.

⁷³ Dessau, *Inscr. Lat. Sel.*, no. 694; cf. *Pan. XII (IX)*, II, 4: *divino monitus instinctu*.

⁷⁴ *Pan. XII (IX)*, 2, 5. Aland, *op. cit.*, p. 590ff. The Christian opinion on such revelations is confirmed by Eusebius, *Triak.*, 18 (GCS, 7, p. 259, 6f.): εἴποις ἀνθυληθεῖς μυρίας τοῦ σοῦ σωτῆρος Θεοφανείας, μυρίος καθύπνους παρουσίας; cf. *Vita Const.*, IV, 22 (note 69); *Triak.*, 11 (GCS, 7, p. 223, 26–28).

⁷⁵ Ewig, “Das Bild Constantins des Grossen,” p. 3ff., who refers to the biblical words in Eusebius, *Triak.*, 11 (GCS, 7, p. 223, 26ff.): φασι πρὸ τῶν ἡμετέρων λόγων θεός αὐτὸς “οὐκ ἔξ ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ δι’ ἀνθρώπου” (Gal. 1: 1), δι’ αὐτοῦ δὲ τοῦ κοινοῦ σωτῆρος καὶ τῆς αὐτοῦ σοι πολλαχῶς ἐπιλαμψάσης θεϊκῆς σψεως τὰ κρύφια τῶν Ἱερῶν ἔξεφηνέν τε καὶ ἀπεκάλυψεν. Kaniuth, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁷⁶ Eusebius, *Triak.*, 10 (GCS, 7, p. 222, 26): οἵα τις ὑποφήτης τοῦ παμβασιλέως Θεοῦ; *ibid.*, 2 (p. 199, 22): οἵα τις ὑποφήτης τοῦ Θεοῦ λόγου πᾶν γένος ἀνθρώπινον ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ κρείττονος ἀνακαλεῖται γνῶσιν.

⁷⁷ Eusebius, *Triak.*, 5 (GCS, 7, p. 206, 1): πάντα τε σὺν εὐσεβείᾳ πράττων καὶ τοῖς ὑπ’ αὐτὸν ἀρχομένοις ὡς ὑπὸ διδασκάλῳ πατιδευομένοις ὅγαθῷ τὴν τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως Θεογνωσίαν προβαλλόμενος (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 215, 24; 219, 21; 219, 29; 220, 5); *ibid.*, p. 259, 5: κήρυξ τῆς ἀληθείας (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 222, 24; 259, 32).

Eusebius calls Christ himself also a vice-gerent of God (*οἰα μεγάλου θεοῦ ὑπαρχος*), thereby, in a manner of speaking, equating the Emperor with Christ.⁷⁸

We should bear in mind that metaphors and rhetorical figures are never to be accepted in their literal meaning. Nevertheless, the patristic exegesis of biblical revelation often drew conclusions which had far-reaching results, and there is no doubt that the Church was confronted with a serious problem in deciding to what extent it should acknowledge this equation of Emperor and Christ, and how his special mission should be correlated with the mission of the Church. It was through Constantine's initiative that the Church was suddenly confronted with this unforeseen situation, when the Emperor claimed to be called by God's own revelation "to make plain what kind of worship is to be offered to the divinity . . . What higher duty have I, in virtue of my imperial office and policy, than to dissipate errors and repress rash indiscretions, and so to cause all to offer the Almighty God true religion, honest concord, and due worship."⁷⁹ Here the Emperor's claim to be respected *οἴα τις κοινὸς ἐπίσκοπος* is manifest. From this claim derives Constantine's obligation to behave *οἴατιςκοινὸς τῶν ἀπανταχοῦ κηδεμῶν*, as one whose duty it was to care for all (Christians) alike in every nation,⁸⁰ even for those who were subjects of the king of Persia—as well as the obligation he had in mind when, on the occasion of entertaining a company of bishops, he remarked that he himself, too, might be considered a bishop (*ώς ἄρα εἶη καὶ αὐτὸς ἐπίσκοπος*), and addressed them ("in my hearing," as Eusebius says),⁸¹ in the following words: "You are bishops of those within the Church, I also am a bishop, ordained by God, of those who are outside (*ἀλλ' ὑμεῖς μὲν τῶν εἰσω τῆς ἐκκλησίας, ἔγὼ δὲ τῶν ἐκτός ὑπὸ θεοῦ καθεσταμένος ἀν εἰνη*)."⁸² These words of Constantine are very much disputed.⁸³ I think that Eusebius himself provides the correct interpretation: "The Emperor's measures corresponded with his words, for he watched over his subjects (*ἐπεσκόπει*) with an episcopal care and exhorted them, as far as in him lay, to follow a godlike life."⁸⁴ In other words: Constantine—as he often proclaimed—

⁷⁸ Eusebius, *Triak.*, 7 (GCS, 7, p. 215, 31; cf. p. 202, 2). In his panegyric addressed to Paulinus, bishop of Tyre, Eusebius says: In the leader of all it is reasonable to suppose that Christ himself dwells in his fullness, and in those that occupy the second rank after him (*Hist. eccl.*, X, 4, 67: *ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ πάντων ἀρχοντι ἴσως αὐτὸς δῆλος Ἑγκάθηται Χριστός, ἐν δὲ τοῖς μετ' αὐτὸν δευτερεύουσιν ἀναλόγως*). Eusebius here has in mind the bishop of Tyre and the clerics of his church. Straub, *Herrschideal*, p. 123.

⁷⁹ Constantine's letter to Celsus, in v. Soden and v. Campenhausen, *op. cit.*, no. 23, line 20ff.: *lecto dilucido iudicio demonstraturus sum, quae et qualis summae divinitati sit adhibenda veneratio et cuiusmodi cultus delectare videatur* (cf. line 38f.); line 41ff.: *quid potius agi a me pro instituto meo ipsiusque principis munere oporteat, quam ut discussis erroribus omnibusque temeritatibus amputatis veram religionem universos concordemque simplicitatem atque meritam omnipotenti deo culturam praesentare perficiam?* (translated by Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 120).

⁸⁰ *Vita Const.*, IV, 8 (GCS, 7, p. 121, 1f.).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, IV, 24; Straub, *Herrschideal*, p. 125; F. Vittinghoff, "Eusebius als Verfasser der 'Vita Constantini,'" *Rheinisches Museum*, 96 (1953), p. 330ff.; Straub, "Kaiser Konstantin als ἐπίσκοπος τῶν ἐκτός," p. 678ff.

⁸² Vogt, "Constantinus der Grosse," col. 360ff.; Straub, "Kaiser Konstantin als ἐπίσκοπος τῶν ἐκτός," p. 678f.; Calderone, *op. cit.*, p. xi; Vittinghoff (see note 81).

⁸³ *Vita Const.*, IV, 24: *ἀκόλουθα δὲ τῷ λόγῳ διανοούμενος τοὺς ἀρχομένους ἀπαντας ἐπεσκόπει, προϋπεπτέ τε δοτητέρ ἀν ἡ δύναμις τὸν εὔσεβη μεταδιώκειν βίον.* As to this assertion, it corresponds exactly to that of the *Triakontaeterikos* (GCS, 7, pp. 199, 19ff.; 200, 17f.: *τὰς ψυχὰς τῇ αὐτοῦ γνώσει καὶ εὐσεβείᾳ προσάγων*; 206, 1–3, etc.; see notes 76, 77).

considered himself ordained by God over all inhabitants of his Empire, whether they were Christian or pagan. As ordained by God, his *sacra maiestas* is to be recognized as equal to episcopal dignity; but considering the fact that there was a bishop resident in each *civitas*, we may assume that in comparing himself to a bishop the Emperor had in mind only the celestial ordination, and that he considered himself entrusted by God with a task "comparable" to the office of a bishop, a task which in fact included the supervision of the cult and the "conversion" of all men to the true faith. The responsibility of the ministers of the Church should be limited to the sphere of specifically ecclesiastical affairs;⁸⁴ they should preach the Gospel, celebrate the eucharistic sacrifice, and administer the sacraments. As far as the citizens' "civic" duties are concerned, it is the Emperor who is their overseer (*ἐπίσκοπος*), *κοινὴν πρὸς ἄπαντας ἐνδεικνύμενος πατρικὴν κηδεμονίαν* (*Vita Const.*, IV, 1). Amongst those civic duties which an emperor felt obliged to demand from his subjects, there was certainly the observance of the cult of the Almighty God. But in fact Constantine, at least in regard to his Christian subjects, wished to remove any doubts that he exercised his universal rule as commissioned by God and as Christ's vicegerent on earth, and that consequently he was entitled to supervise the Church also. To the Church he granted autonomous privileges; thus, he himself made a distinction between *ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τοῦ Θεοῦ* and *τοῖς ἔκτος κατὰ πόλιν δήμοις*,⁸⁵ and thus the bishops also could be called *ἀρχοντες*, as were the state officials and governors of provinces. In a similar way Julian, who went to great pains to establish a pagan counterpart to Constantine's organization of Church and Empire, was able to tell the *ἀρχιερεὺς Γαλατίας*: *ἀρχεῖς γὰρ αὐτός, ὡς οἰσθα, τῶν ἔνδον, ἐπεὶ καὶ ὁ θεῖος ταῦτα ἀπαιτεῖ θεσμός*.⁸⁶ The sacred sphere is differentiated from the secular one, but in both the Emperor claims the same right of surveillance which stems from an authority comparable to that of the episcopal dignity ordained by God. The fact that, later, his son and successor Constantius II, who wanted to institutionalize the charismatic calling of his father, was accused of acting like an *episcopus episcoporum*,⁸⁷ proves that in the time of Constantine the claim to be respected *οἴκα τις κοινὸς ἐπίσκοπος* was familiar to the Church. If on the other hand, as Seston has correctly remarked,⁸⁸ Constantine has granted to the bishops a function which, seemingly, is equal to his own imperial office, one should not overlook the fact that the comparison *ὡς ἄρα εἴη καὶ αὐτός ἐπίσκοπος* chiefly refers to his *sacra maiestas*, which so far the Church had not been able to recognize in the same sense in which it was now applied to the Emperor under God's immediate grace. "The interpretation of those terms depends on the point of view one takes,"⁸⁹ and we should note

⁸⁴ S. Mazzarino in G. Giannelli and S. Mazzarino, *Trattato di Storia Romana*, 2 (Rome, 1956), p. 427, note 7; Calderone, *op. cit.*, p. XLIII; both scholars are, in my opinion, correct in identifying those who are *εἴσω τῆς ἐκκλησίας* with the *ordo clericorum*; therefore, those who are *ἔκτος τῆς ἐκκλησίας* might be the *laics* (*plebs Christiana, saeculares*, adherents of all religious, even pagan denominations).

⁸⁵ *Vita Const.*, II, 23 (GCS, 7, p. 50, 23).

⁸⁶ *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, 3, Loeb Class. Libr. (London, 1923), p. 72.

⁸⁷ Lucifer of Calaris, *Moriendum esse pro dei filio*, 13 (CSEL, 14, p. 311, 25).

⁸⁸ W. Seston, "Constantine as a 'bishop,'" *Journal of Roman Studies*, 37 (1947), p. 127f.

⁸⁹ Straub, "Kaiser Konstantin als ἐπίσκοπος τῶν ἔκτος," p. 682.

that, after Constantine's conversion, the Christians suddenly realized that hitherto *within the hierarchy of the Christian Church no place was provided for a Christian emperor*. His sense of religious mission and his claim to political leadership made Constantine seek that peculiar position which is precisely characterized in the formulae handed down by Eusebius.⁹⁰ This problem would continue to be debated for many centuries. But it is significant that, precisely because of the Empire governed by Constantine "by the grace of God," from that time on metaphors deriving from the religious sphere were incessantly used to define the imperial administration⁹¹ and, in the light of Old Testament examples, they were imbued with new meaning.

The emperor's pagan as well as his Christian subjects were obliged to venerate his *sacra maiestas*. His palace remained a *domus divina* (it had been likened to a temple);⁹² the ceremonies that took place in the palace were considered a holy ritual, *sancti palatii ritus*.⁹³ The orders sent out from the *sacrarium*, the *adyton*, were received as *oracula*⁹⁴ of the emperor's divine *numen*, to whose *altaria* supplications (*preces*) had to be addressed.⁹⁵ To be sure, these are only metaphors, but they corresponded to ceremonies and insignia. Even in the periods of the post-Constantinian, Christian Empire, the imperial majesty far transcended the secular domain. If the imperial court is conceived as a reflection of the celestial court,⁹⁶ we should not forget that this celestial prototype, in turn, was actually a projection of terrestrial conditions. In the eyes of Eusebius, and in terms of official ideology, both the celestial and the terrestrial Empire are manifestations of God's universal rule. *Dei imaginem habet rex sicut et episcopus Christi*, explains the author of the *Quaestiones veteris et novi testamenti*.⁹⁷ In this light it becomes clear why high officials of the emperor's government, whose service was usually thought of as *militia* (they received the *cingulum* on their appointment), are called *praesules*,⁹⁸ and are compared

⁹⁰ Straub, "Konstantins Verzicht auf den Gang zum Kapitol," p. 312f.

⁹¹ W. Ensslin, *Gottkaiser und Kaiser von Gottes Gnaden*, Sitzungsber. d. Akad. d. Wiss., München, Phil.-hist. Kl., Heft 6 (1943).

⁹² A. Alföldi, "Die Ausgestaltung des monarchischen Zeremoniells am römischen Kaiserhofe," *Röm. Mitt.*, 49 (1934), p. 31 ff.; Treitinger, *op. cit.*, p. 49ff.

⁹³ Pacatus, *Pan. II (XII)*, 21, 1.

⁹⁴ Straub, *Herrscherideal*, p. 146; O. Gradenwitz, *Heidelberger Index zum Theodosianus* (Berlin, 1925).

⁹⁵ *Nov. Anthem.*, I (*Cod. Theod.*, eds. Th. Mommsen and P. M. Meyer, vol. 2, p. 204, 6.f); *Nov. Val.*, XXI, 1 (Oct. 21, 446; *ibid.*, p. 108): *cum de nostris altaribus coniuges petant*, etc.

⁹⁶ E. Peterson, *Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem* (Leipzig, 1935), reprinted in *Theologische Traktate* (Munich, 1951), p. 45 ff.; Alföldi (see note 92); Straub, *Herrscherideal*, p. 118f.

⁹⁷ CSEL, 50, p. 63; Grabar, "Un médaillon en or . . ." (see note 49), p. 34ff.

⁹⁸ W. Ehlers, "Praesul," Pauly-Wissowa, *Realencyclopädie*, 22, 2 (1954), col. 1568f.; Ed. Wölfflin, "Der Papst Gelasius als Latinist," *Archiv f. Lat. Lexicographie*, 12 (1902), p. 5f. The use of this topos in the sphere of Church and politics will be discussed in another study; cf. J. Straub, "Zur Ordination von Bischöfen und Beamten in der christlichen Spätantike," *Mullus, Festschr. Theodor Klauser* (see note 43), pp. 336ff., 342, note 40f. Originally the term *praesul*, δ προηγούμενος τοῦ ἱεροῦ (*Gramm. Lat.*, ed. H. Keil, 1 [Leipzig, 1857], p. 544, 5), δ ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς προορχούμενος (*Corpus Gloss. Lat.*, ed. G. Goetz, 2 [Leipzig, 1888], p. 157, 38), meant "kultischer Vortänzer," "one who leaps or dances before others" (C. T. Lewis and C. Short, *Latin Dictionary*, p. 1432), in particular "the leader of the Salii, who annually leaped and danced through the city, bearing the *ancilia*" (*loc. cit.*). In the Later Roman Empire the term was used in connection with various leading functions in the secular as well as in the ecclesiastical sphere. Some of the numerous references which Professor W. Ehlers, of the Thesaurus Linguae Latinae in Munich, was kind enough to point out to me, shall be given here: Hegesippus (ed. V. Ussani, CSEL, 66) refers to *praesules provinciarum* (I, 41, 8), *deus*

with priests who in the service of the *sacra maiestas* wear the *infulae potestatis*.⁹⁹ Since, at the same time, the Christian bishops were also called *praesules* and were likewise granted the *infulae dignitatis*, the significance of this parallelism becomes evident.

When Christ is conceived of as an *imperator*, the *imperator's* image must recall that of Christ.¹⁰⁰ In the Ravenna mosaic, Christ the *imperator* is shown treading on the lion and the dragon;¹⁰¹ we are told that Constantine had already "caused a lofty tablet to be painted and set up in the front of the portico of his palace, so as to be visible to all, a representation of the salutary sign placed above his head, and below it that hateful and savage adversary of mankind . . . falling headlong, under the form of a dragon, to the abyss of destruction. For the sacred oracles—in the Books of the Prophets—have described him as a dragon and a crooked serpent (*Isaiah 27:1*)."¹⁰² In one passage Eusebius even goes so far in this type of metaphorical comparison as to say of Constantine: "He dedicates himself as a noble offering, a first fruit of that world."¹⁰³ This is the language of the Bible and of the Church. Is it surprising that Constantine himself takes such comparisons, or "figures," as seriously as the Church normally took such comparisons in interpreting biblical "types"?¹⁰⁴

We know that Athanasius, due to his own bitter experience, already wanted to limit the concessions he had originally been prepared to make, in order to achieve a clear distinction between sacerdotal and imperial authority.¹⁰⁵ The

praesul (I, 43, 6), *Caesar . . . praesul orbis terrarum* (I, 44, 8), (*Iesus*) *praesul pacis* (V, 2, 1), (*deus*) *praesul templi* (V, 32). Ausonius (ed. M. Schenkl, MGH, *Auct. Ant.*, 5, pt. 2) praises one of his friends as *praesul creatus litteris* (*Ep.* IV, 79), and calls Probus, *praef. praet.* and *consul*, *senati praesul* (*Ep.* XVI, 2, 19; cf. *Comm. prof.*, XVI, 6, 15: *cohortis praesul praetoriae*). Rutilius Namatianus refers to the *praef. urbis* as *praesul* (*De reditu suo*, ed. R. Helm [Heidelberg, 1933], I, vs. 550). A great number of similar meanings is registered in G. Goetz, *Corpus Gloss. Lat.*, 7 (Leipzig, 1901), p. 124, s.v. *praesul*. Here we do not have to enumerate the Christian authors who usually called the bishops "*praesules*," but, apparently, not before the fifth century (e.g., Gelasius, cf. Wölfflin, *op. cit.*). It is interesting to note that the emperor himself is only occasionally referred to in this way, as for example by the pagan *Auctor de rebus bellicis* (ed. E. A. Thompson [Oxford, 1952]), *praef.*, 3: *rei publicae praesul*, and by the Christian author Alcimus Avitus (ed. R. Peiper, MGH, *Auct. Ant.*, 6, pt. 2, p. 100, 30): *praesul noster* (= *imperator*). The same term is also used by Avitus for his Burgundian king (*loc. cit.*, p. 15, 14; p. 130, 20; etc.).

⁹⁹ *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, 7 (1954), col. 1498ff.; *inf. potestatis* (*Cod. Theodos.*, IX, 41, 1, 1 [eds. Th. Mommsen and P. M. Meyer, 1, pt. 2]); *i. proconsulares* (Jerome, *Ep.*, LXVI, 7, 2 [CSEL, 54]); *i. principatus* (Ammianus Marcellinus, XV, 6, 3); *i. imperii* (Cassiodorus, *Hist. eccl. tripartita*, V, 50, 4 [CSEL, 71]); *i. imperiales* (*Codex Iustinianus*, VII, 37, 3, 5); *infularum dignitas saecularium* (Ambrose, *De paupertate*, II, 8, 69 [CSEL, 73]; *honorum infulae* (Cyprian, *Ad Donatum*, 13 [CSEL, 3, pt. 1, p. 14, line 12]); in the days of the declining *res publica* Cicero (*De leg. agraria*, I, 1, 6) lamented about his *insignibus atque infulis imperii venditis, quibus ornataam nobis maiores nostri rem publicam tradiderunt.*

¹⁰⁰ J. Kollwitz, "Das Bild von Christus dem König in Kunst und Liturgie der christlichen Frühzeit," *Theologie und Glaube, Werkhefte für den katholischen Klerus*, 38 (1947), p. 95.

¹⁰¹ F. W. Deichmann, *Frühchristliche Bauten und Mosaiken von Ravenna* (Baden-Baden, 1958), pl. 216f.; E. Peterson, "Christus als Imperator," *Theol. Traktate* (Munich, 1951), p. 151ff.

¹⁰² *Vita Const.*, III, 3.

¹⁰³ *Triak.*, 2 (GCS, 7, p. 200, 13): μέγα δῶρον ἀνατιθεῖς αὐτὸς ἔαυτὸν οὐ πεπίστευται κόσμου τὸ ἀκροθίνιον, *ibid.* (p. 200, 1 ff.): τὰ χαριστήρια . . . ἀποδίδωσιν, οὐ κατά τοὺς παλαιοὺς αἱμαστοὶ καὶ λύθροις τοὺς βασιλικοὺς οἴκους μιανων, . . . τὴν δ' αὐτῷ τῷ βασιλεῖ τῶν δλων προσφιλῆ καὶ χαριεσσαν θυσίαν, αὐτὴν δηλαδὴ τὴν αὐτοῦ βασιλικὴν ψυχὴν καὶ τὸν νοῦν τὸν θεοπεπέστατον ἀφιερῶν αὐτῷ.

¹⁰⁴ Moses, David, Paul, even Christ.

¹⁰⁵ K. F. Hagel, *Kirche und Kaisertum in Lehre und Leben des Athanasius*, Diss. Tübingen (Berlin-Leipzig, 1933), pp. 33 ff., 47 ff.

Western Church soon learned to interpret the meaning of the two competing authorities in such a way that she herself became a reflection of imperial institutions. Thus Sägmüller¹⁰⁶ was able to characterize “the Church as Imperium Romanum” in regard to its external appearances, the *ecclesia catholica* which had become the *ecclesia Romana*. Opitz,¹⁰⁷ on the other hand, rightly points out that Constantine intended to integrate the Church community into the universal community of the Roman Empire, to transform the Empire into an *ecclesia*, in which the specifically theological, liturgical, and ritual functions were primarily reserved for the *ordo clericorum* (bishops), while the supervision (ἐπισκοπή) of the *populus Christianus* (which was to be identified with the state) was entrusted to the emperor, who ruled on earth as vicegerent of God, *vicarius Christi* and *κοινὸς ἐπίσκοπος*.

When, in the conflict between *sacerdotium* and *imperium* which erupted in the Middle Ages, the Church based its claims on the legend of the Constantinian Donation, Dante lamented: “Ahi, Costantin, di quanto mal fu matre, Non la tua conversion, ma quella dote Che da te prese il primo ricco patre” (*Inferno*, XIX, 115ff.). The good intention of the pious Emperor had unfortunate consequences for both Empire and Church: “Sotto buona intenzion che fe’ mal frutto, Per cedere al pastor si fece greco” (*Paradiso*, XX, 56f.).

Today we know that the legend of the Constantinian Donation was invented at the time when papal authority began to compete with imperial authority. We also know that Constantine intended to serve precisely the *officium* which, according to Dante, was entrusted to the emperor by order of God, namely, *humanum genus uni velle esse subiectum* (*De monarchia*, 10).

In founding Constantinople, which soon became the New Rome, as his residence, he laid the foundation for the emergence of a ruler concept which was to be developed in the Byzantine Empire after the model he had created, and thereby “he made himself a Greek.”

¹⁰⁶ J. B. Sägmüller, “Die Idee von der Kirche als Imperium Romanum im kanon. Recht,” *Theol. Quartalschrift*, 80 (1898), p. 50ff.

¹⁰⁷ H.-G. Opitz, “Eusebius von Caesarea als Theologe,” *Zeitschr. f. neutest. Wiss.*, 34 (1935), pp. 1 ff., 15; W. Schneemelcher, “Athanasius von Alexandrien als Theologe und als Kirchenpolitiker,” *Zeitschr. f. neutest. Wiss.*, 43 (1950/51), p. 242ff.; Baynes, *Constantine the Great and the Christian Church*, p. 30.